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Rehab troupe encourages residents of nursing home

Therapy Changes lives

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FISHERSVILLE — Something's going on. The women at Birch Gardens nursing home got their hair done on Wednesday.

By 6 o'clock the residents were wheeled or walked to the lobby where more than a dozen young men and women wearing red T-shirts, jeans and sneakers stood in groups, giggling, talking about their day.

"Shhh," some tell the noisy ones. "Remember where you are."

"How you doing?" Charise Davidson asks one woman sitting in the lobby.

A smile crossed the woman's face and she grinned up at Charise.

"I'm fine," she said and smiled.

In a few minutes, this praise dance group would help the residents forget where they are.

"This is great," said resident Linda Propes. "It breaks up the monotony."

The members of the

dance group understand living away from home. They understand about needing a little extra help. They are patients at Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center, and they're taking their show on the road to help others — and to help themselves.

The group is the brain-child of Tracee Cherry,

At 33, Cherry is on the helping side of things now, but that wasn't always the case.

She lost custody of her four children years ago because she was in an abusive marriage. In 2003, she was shot and left paralyzed from the waist down. In October that year, she came to WWRC as a patient.

The fact that Cherry is in a wheelchair has no bearing on her work as a choreographer. She has her dancers' respect.

"I've been down like her," Davidson, the group's DJ, said. "She shows us that no matter what we're going through, we can do it."

Cherry introduced her group that still doesn't have a name.

"We've been performing on campus, and now we're starting to go off-

campus," she told the Birch Garden residents, sitting in front of the crew.

"We just want to inspire you," she said, and pointing behind her, "and inspire them, too."

Before her injury, Cherry said she felt drawn to people who needed help. "I liked helping people," she said. Now that she's working at the center rather than a student, she has found that calling, she said.

"I've always been religious. I went through a lot. Believe it or not, I used to be bad," she said with a grin.

Now she wants to bring others through tough times, she said. Her injury and work at the center changed her life.

"Now, I am finally able to smile," she said. "It was like, 'Gracious!' Wow. It was worth it."

When the dancers finished



Mike Tripp/The News Leader

Latoya Brown performs Wednesday with the rest of the praise dancers from the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center while performing for residents at Birch Gardens Assisted Living.



Mike Tripp/The News Leader

With Jason Hawthorne, Latoya Brown and Chiquita Pierce behind her, Tracee Cherry, organizer of the praise dance team from the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center, speaks with a resident at Birch Gardens Assisted Living.

their numbers, they fanned out to talk to the residents at Birch Gardens.

"It was wonderful," Propes said. "High marks."